

Conversation Pieces
Volume 55

Liberating the Astronauts

by

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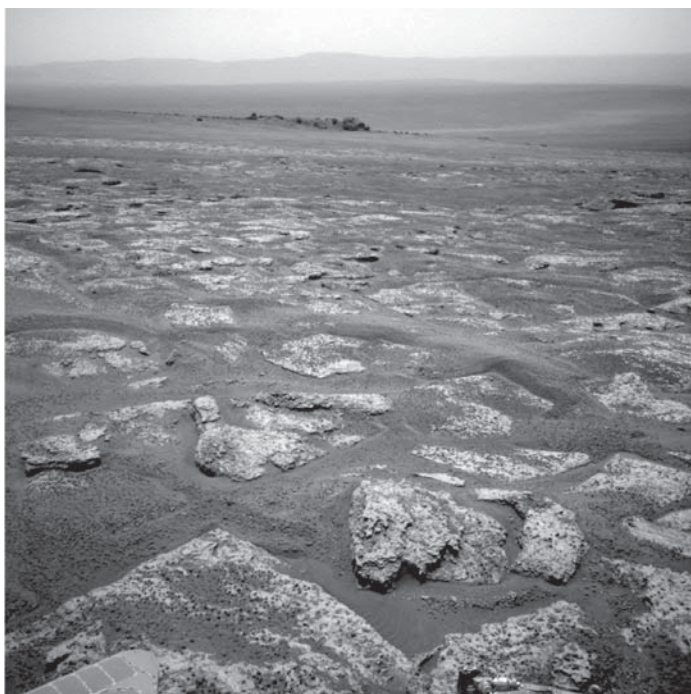
Historical EVA a few meters away from the cabin of the Earth-orbiting space shuttle Challenger
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*Not fitting in gives us the freedom to stand out.
These poems are for the stand-outs.
May you all rejoice in your freedom.*

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Approaching Endeavor Crater: Navigation camera on NASA Mars Exploration Rover Opportunity, NASA ID PIA14759, Secondary Creator Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech (Oct. 10, 2011)

With No One at the Watch

There are rooms with no gods in them.
—C. K. Williams

Most places have
no gods.
Summer homes on beaches where
children build castles
closer down towards the water.
They instantly crumble.
Weak swimmers rip away in the tide.
Roads that escape from watchful eyes,
winding up into cliffs to coves—
no gods, no goddesses there.
Rooms have no redemption.
Land, no mercy.

Chasing Zero

I want to know what green is.
I want to know if what I call green
is what everyone else calls green
when we all watch Dorothy
walk down the yellow brick road.
I would have to be in someone
else's head to know for sure.
I would have to be John Malkovich
plus everyone else.

Max Weber told me on a museum wall
that "color must be more than a color,
a form more than a form."
Yet he still cannot clarify for me
the green conundrum.

Color can play tricks on your mind,
making you mistake vanilla for marshmallow
with a simple slight change in white hue.
There are some chemical compounds
we can smell only when they evaporate,
like coffee and chocolate.

Those compounds are volatile.
Green is not one of those compounds.

Instead, green is a reflection of light
caught inside the prison of a prism,
locked in the middle of a rainbow's arc.

There are people who can taste color.
They call themselves synesthetes.
They say green tastes like almonds.
I've heard cyanide does, too.

The liquor store up on Sunrise sells
propane and cigarettes.
That is an interesting business model.

That's also the place where after
a rainstorm the sky grows clear blue,
clear enough to relieve your sinuses,
where the buildings part and reveal
complete rainbows as the humidity disappears.

It smells like springtime.
It tastes like grass.
Grass is green,

a non-volatile substance
that smells freshcut long after
the gardeners leave with their
gasoline-fed mowers.

Maybe that's what green is.

A lingering newness. A fresh break
from time. A universal subsiding.
Something that simply clicks.

Skyscape

a light bright peg
a peg and a puncture
black construction paper
white dots against black
dull stars become holes
for rainbow radiance

constellation plugged
into a wall. when removed,
turned over, a wasps' nest,
delicate and shredding.

forever into orbit
black against black and blue
layers float away into
belts of debris

Why It Took So Long to Watch the Lunar Landing

She said simply, “I don’t like space.”
And I understood. It’s the opposite
of claustrophobia, like steroidal agoraphobia—
the emptiness, the atmosphere,
the feeling of not falling.
The freedom of a weightless body
that can float away at any moment
when not tethered, or if the tether
comes undone. And if you should
shout out for help,
there is nothing there to carry sound.
There’s no *there* there.

Sounds of Privacy

Stippled yellow, a mustic
browned pulp, a banner
stuck together with midnight.
Dusty attic silver cup
yo-yo trove and plastic elephant.
It's a whine of wisdom,
a yawn of forgiven fringe.

In a backyard winter:
slush
a gutter bulging
frozen unfreezing
a split lip bleeding

Lilted swing
come back
to me.
Please.

Bargain parties
ten cents five cents one cent
a haypenny, half copper half zilch,
a little older a little less angry
dozing with electric sleep.
An apple peeled and cored.
A weed ripped at the root.
Open until finished slammed shut.

Remembering the Challenger

Puffed pure white
A cumulus line bifurcated

Seventy-three seconds
and it broke apart

They called it a major malfunction
live on the air

In the air sparks and metal
dropped into the Atlantic

There would be no lessons from space
only this one at launch

Consumption of Space

A bright room is a vacuum,
all heat and light,
all colors vibrant and willing,
pulled in towards one apex
dull and hard.

The speed of light is
186000 miles per second
700 million miles per hour
denoted by c .
That makes breathing near impossible.

The nothingness fills the room,
pushing against itself
while the rest pulls
towards invisible boundaries
that grow out and up.
The formula for volume is
length times width times height.
The point when taking notice will
mean something passes.
Only remnants of that point
remain to mock, to scold,
to turn scornful eyes.

Under a magnifying glass the room
grows but so do its objects
so that illusion won't work anyway.

The area of a triangle is
one half its base times its height.
The shortest path between two points
backfires on itself,
proving what it was trying to hide all along.